

Minutes
Catawba County Board of Commissioners
Regular Session, Monday, August 1, 2005, 9:30 a.m.

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Catawba County Schools

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GDS

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The Catawba County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, August 1, 2005, at 9:30 a.m. in the 1924 Courthouse, Robert E. Hibbitts Meeting Room, 30 North College Avenue, Newton, North Carolina.

Present were Chair Katherine W. Barnes, Vice-Chair Dan Hunsucker, Commissioners Glenn E. Barger, Lynn M. Lail and Barbara G. Beatty.

Also present were County Manager J. Thomas Lundy, Assistant County Manager Joellen Daley, Assistant County Manager Lee Worsley, County Attorney Robert Oren Eades, Attorney Anne Marie Pease and County Clerk Barbara E. Morris.

1. Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.
2. Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
3. The Invocation was offered by Vice-Chair Hunsucker.
4. Vice-Chair Hunsucker made a motion to approve the minutes from the Regular Meeting of July 11, 2005. The motion carried unanimously.
5. Recognition of Special Guests.
Chair Barnes recognized the many guests for the various presentations scheduled for the meeting and a member of the Hickory School Board.
6. Public comment for items not on the agenda. None.
7. Presentations.
 - a. Assistant County Manager Joellen Daley introduced Mr. Steve Allen of Solutions for Local Government, Inc. to present an overview of a feasibility study of a Public Safety Training and Education Complex for the County. This was the first of the scheduled presentations on this study, with additional meetings scheduled with the Rescue Association, Area Managers, Emergency Services Planning Committee, Fire Association and the CVCC Board of Trustees and a yet to be schedule meeting with the law enforcement community. Assistant County Manager Daley pointed out that the County had requested funding at the federal level for the project – specifically for the design which would be approximately \$950,000 – but to date there has not been any direct earmarks out of the Homeland Security money but it is hoped that may occur in September. The County's lobbyists are also attempting to get some language into the earmarks directly related to this facility's funding.

Steve Allen said the process had started last October and November. Catawba County, the City of Hickory and Catawba Valley Community College have been in discussions to develop a regional public safety training and education complex. This state-of-art complex would address, through a coordinated approach involving all participating agencies and organizations, the multi-faceted educational training needs for

public safety and public service providers within the Greater Hickory Metropolitan area and beyond. This type of complex does not exist currently anywhere in North Carolina. Mr. Allen discussed that this initial concept was consistent with Hickory's "Horizons: Continuing the Vision Master Plan" and the 2002 Future Forward Committee and had support from CVCC with the potential acquisition of property by Catawba County in close proximity to the Catawba campus and the direction, development and facilitation of the academic elements of the Public Safety Complex's curriculum.

Mr. Allen went on to review the location of the proposed site (approximately 38 acres), the proposed design of the complex, the proposed utilization, control and coordination of the facilities within the complex and the potential number of emergency, fire and law enforcement personnel who would utilize such a facility to meet their certification and continuing education requirements. Mr. Allen addressed questions from the Board regarding truck driving training, citizen complaints regarding smoke from burning exercises and the ability to utilize the complex for various forms of training at the same time as well as the public's use of the facility for activities such as dog training, training in proper use of fire extinguishers, etc.

Chair Barnes asked for any further questions and none were expressed and Commissioner Barger made a motion to accept the feasibility report and to direct the staff to continue the pursuit of funding for the design of this facility. The motion carried unanimously.

a. Mr. Steven Rackley, Engineer and Project Manager from the North Carolina Department of Transportation presented a request for the Board's support in the form of a resolution of the realignment of Kiser Island Road. Duke Power is expanding their facility and Kiser Island Road intersects HWY 150 a little further north of the Duke Power entrance. Duke Power approached NCDOT regarding realigning Kiser Island Road and traffic engineers studied the request and determined it would be beneficial. The chief engineers in Raleigh have agreed to do this project outside the usual MPO's and RPO's and have agreed to deal directly with Duke Power through a construction agreement. The project will realign the last .214 miles of Kiser Island Road to intersect directly across from the Duke Power facility which will eliminate many traffic conflicts with traffic entering HWY 150 from both the Duke Power Facility and Kiser Island Road. Chair Barnes questioned whether the DOT planned for a traffic light at this intersection and Mr. Rackley stated that traffic flow studies that had been done did not currently warrant a signal but the DOT would continue to monitor the intersection. Chair Barnes suggested checking it every week since she traveled that road frequently and was concerned with the difficulty on entering HWY 150. Commissioner Barger asked whether the current construction traffic was considered in their determination and Mr. Rackley said this was considered in traffic counts. Commissioner Beatty said she believed that Duke Power would be willing to put a traffic signal in and Mr. Rackley said that has been offered by Duke but the traffic engineers are not allowed by NUCTD, which regulates traffic devices, to approve the installation. Commissioner Beatty asked for copies of the recent traffic studies and Mr. Rackley said he would get them to the Board.

Sarah Scherr, a citizen from Terrell, asked if the future widening of NC 150 should be considered prior to spending the money on this realignment (this would be paid for by Duke Power and not County dollars) but it was indicated that the widening of NC 150 would not occur until approximately 2010 to 2012 and the benefits of the realignment would be realized for many years prior to that proposed widening. Commissioner Barger made a motion to approve the resolution with the changes regarding the traffic studies and traffic signal and suggested the traffic figures be looked at as quickly as possible as he felt this was a safety issue and also complimented Duke Power in their partnership with the County and the DOT in this issue. The motion carried unanimously. The revised resolution reads as follows:

RESOLUTION #2005-16
APPROVAL OF NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
RELOCATION OF KISER ISLAND ROAD (SR-1841)

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to realign .214 miles of Kiser Island Road at NC 150 and pursuant to G.S. 136-11.1, NCDOT has informed Catawba County of its intent and has requested a written resolution from the County expressing its view on the project; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to G.S. 136-11.1, failure of the County to express its view within 45 days of the NCDOT request for a resolution will not prevent the Department of Transportation from taking action; and

WHEREAS, the proposed realignment of Kiser Island Road will align it with the Duke Power entrance on NC 150; and

WHEREAS, the proposed realignment of Kiser Island Road will improve sight distance and other safety features of Kiser Island Road; and

WHEREAS, the construction agreement will be between the North Carolina Department of Transportation and Duke Power and require no funding from Catawba County.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Catawba County Board of Commissioners has reviewed this request and recommends the realignment of .214 miles of Kiser Island Road by the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The Board further states its concern regarding the safety of this intersection, requests traffic studies which have been completed regarding a traffic signal and recommends that traffic patterns and traffic volumes be reviewed by the Department of Transportation for consideration of the placement of a traffic signal at the intersection of Kiser Island Road at NC 150.

This the 1st day of August, 2005.



Katherine W. Barnes, Chair
Catawba County Board of Commissioners

8. Appointments.

Vice-Chair Hunsucker recommended the reappointment of Ronn Abernathy to a second term representing the Juvenile Counseling category; Bobby Boyd, Director of County Department of Social Services to a fourth term as a Board of Commissioner appointee; Jennie Connor to a second term representing the United Way or Non-profit agency; Sandi Fotheringham to a second term as a Board appointee; Judy Ikerd, Budget Manager to a fourth term as a Board of Commissioner appointee and Johnny Scott to a second term presenting the Substance Abuse Professional category on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. Vice-Chair Hunsucker also recommended the appointment to this Board of Reverend Mary Metcalf for a first term representing the Faith category; Brandi Tolbert as the Chief District Judge designee; Bright Light and Britney McConnell for first terms in the category of a person under age of 18; Paul Holden, Catawba County Schools employee, for a first term to replace Dr. Ann Hart; Mac McLeod, Hickory City Recreation Department, for a first term representing a local parks and recreation program; Tonya White, Deputy Sheriff, as the local sheriff designee; Janie Sigmon, Interim Superintendent, Newton-Conover Schools for a first term in the school superintendent category; Capt. Dan Carlson, as the Chief of Police designee to serve an unexpired term of Steve Wright and John Cagle as the designee for the District Attorney.

Commissioner Barbara Beatty recommended the reappointment of John Biggerstaff for a fifth term as a perimeter member and Lewis Parlier for a third term as an alternate perimeter member to the Maiden Board of Adjustment and the appointment of Larry Teague and Brenda Isaac to first terms on the Library Board of Trustees.

Commissioner Lynn Lail recommended the reappointment of Anne Hall as an industry appointee to a fourth term, Tamara Hefner as a commission appointee to a fourth term, Alberta Stone as a commission appointee for a second term to the Nursing and Rest Home Community Advisory Committee and reappointment of Margaret Hilda Elliott for a third term in the Registered Nurse category; Clark Isaac for a third term in the Engineer category; Dr. William Pekman for a third term in the Physician category and Dr. Kerry Reeves in the Optometrist category to the Public Health Board.

Commissioner Glenn Barger recommended the appointment of Dr. Robert Wright to the Dentist category for an unexpired term on the Public Health Board.

These recommendations came in the form of a motion. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Consent Agenda:

County Manager J. Thomas Lundy presented the following consent agenda for approval:

- a. A tax refund for Hickory Dermatology in the amount of \$30.15.
- b. A allocation of a JAG (Justice Assistance Grant) for the Catawba County Sheriff's Office and Hickory Police Department in the amount of \$47,683. The Board approved this grant application in March 2005 and the funds have now been received. The Board authorized the funds to be used for tasers, a portable forensic workhouse and a holographic targeting system. Supplemental Appropriation: Revenue (110-210050-620320) Justice Assistance Grant \$47,683 – Appropriation: (110-210050-849178) Justice Assistance Grant \$47,683
- c. An increase in the public health fee from \$88.00 to \$105 for Menomune vaccine (for meningitis) which results from the cost being passed along to the County from the supplier.
- d. The appropriation of funds donated by Mr. Bob Vollinger in the amount of \$1000 for teacher supplements which are required to be appropriated to the three school systems on a per pupil basis. Appropriation: Donations (110-71-0050-681960) \$1000; Schools Current Expense (110-710050-863100) \$705; (110-710050-864100) \$116; (110-710050-865100) \$179
- e. Request to remove Corey Teague and appoint Laurie Bradshaw as Map Review Officer for the City of Claremont.

Chair Barnes asked if there was any requests for any of these items to be broken out from the consent agenda for discussion and none were made. Vice-Chair Hunsucker made a motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Departmental Reports.

a. Catawba County Schools:

Catawba County Schools Chairman Charlie Wyant and Ernest Williams were present for the presentation. Mr. Williams came forward and stated Dr. Markley (Superintendent) sent his regrets for being unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Williams stated the Catawba County Schools Board was requesting the transfer of funds from the 2005/06 Capital Outlay future projects funds for the design of new Catawba Elementary School. He said the schedule for opening this school would be two years from now – August 2007. To stay on schedule on this project, plans and construction documents were now needed. It was requested that \$414,259 be allocated from the \$738,000 which was set aside for unspecified projects in the current fiscal year's budget. Mr. Williams said the other needs in the County were looked at where other classrooms are needed but it was felt that because of the projected growth in this area of the county, there would be approximately 700-750 elementary students in that area in the next three to seven years. Chair Barnes asked about the 19 mobile units that Mr. Williams had mentioned were in the St. Stephens area and Mr. Williams said there were also 7 in _____, 8 in Sweetwater and 4 at Clyde Campbell. He said there is a 2nd elementary school in the long-range plan which would be the St. Stephen's area. Chair Barnes asked what the school board had indicated would be done with the current Catawba school and Mr. Williams said he thought there were discussions regarding it becoming a community area or a recreation area for the Catawba area where the old gym and sports fields could be used. He said he was unsure of

any plans for the school building itself. Mr. Williams said the School Board would like to employ CBSA to do these plans and the school would be a footprint of the St. Stephens Elementary School and it would save approximately \$100,000 by using those same plans with just a new front design on the facility for its own distinction. Commissioner Beatty asked if the site of the current elementary school was undesirable and Mr. Williams said it was due to the limited acreage and the lay of the land and the School Board was very pleased with the new site. Commissioner Barger clarified that the motion was to extend dollars that were already appropriated in the future schools projects and that the school board had prioritized this need – Mr. Lundy clarified that this fund started at \$1 million but at the budget wrap up the Board of Commissioners took some of those funds for the Tuttle and Maiden Junior High projects, so what is left is approximately \$730,000. Commissioner Barger said he wanted everyone to understand that this was the same pot of money and it has a limit to it. Vice-Chair Hunsucker made a motion to appropriate \$414,259.00 from future project funds (420-750100-863200-30050-9-01) to School Construction (420-750050-995423-30050-9-02) for the design of the Catawba Elementary School with supplemental appropriation to Catawba Co. Elementary (423-740100-863200-31126-2-01). The carried unanimously.

b. Barry Edwards, Utilities and Engineering Director, presented proposed changes to the convenience center fee schedules, proposed security equipment and request for the approval of reducing the hours of operation at the Cooksville Convenience Center. Also recommended was a 30 day survey of the customers of the Sherrills Ford Convenience Center concerning the days of operations of that site (Thursday thru Monday vs. Wednesday thru Sunday (the current schedule).

Mr. Edwards stated that staff had recommended the reduction of hours of operation at the Cooksville Convenience Center to Friday and Saturday only with extended hours on those days. The current cost at this site are the highest operational cost per ton, \$154.41 per ton in comparison to \$65.44 per ton at Blackburn Center. Cooksville has the lowest monthly average customer/trip count and lowest average volume of waste.

Mr. Edwards noted the only change proposed to the fee schedule was to eliminate the bag for bag credit for recyclables in an effort to make up the loss of more than \$180,000 for the five centers projected for fiscal year 2004-05. Customers would still have the incentive to recycle because it would reduce the number of bags of waste they would have and recyclables would still be accepted free of charge. The recommended fee would be \$1.00 for each bag of individual bags of waste being disposed.

Also requested was approval of the security cameras at sites to deter theft and to ensure appropriate customer service. Citizen Sarah Scherr asked if these cameras were going to be installed at all sites and when this was confirmed, asked if the expense was justified. Both Barry Edwards and Don Felts of GDS indicated the cost was necessary due to recent security concerns and to ensure courteous and consistent service to the citizens using these sites. The initial cost of the cameras will be \$1740 per site (\$8700 for all five centers), \$2150 for remote monitoring equipment and \$30 per month, per site, for high speed internet connectivity.

Mr. Edwards said they would begin a three month survey at Sherrills Ford regarding hours of operation this week.

Commissioner Barger asked with the reduction of hours at the Cooksville Center, what cost reductions would be realized. Mr. Edwards asked Mr. Felts who said the cost reduction would be \$768 per month. Chair Barnes asked what the cost per month for GDS service was and it was indicated that this was \$15.45 per month if the customer recycles and \$20.95 with no recycling. Chair Barnes said then if you had 15 bags of trash in a month, it would be better to have your trash picked up. Commissioner Beatty suggested a better sales program for the GDS service. Commissioner Barger clarified that a bag was considered a 30 gallon bag.

Commissioner Lail asked if it would be GDS' responsibility to monitor the cameras and Mr. Edwards confirmed this.

Vice-Chair Hunsucker made a motion to adjust the Convenience Center Fee Schedule, approve the proposed security equipment and approve the reduction of hours of operation at the Cooksville Convenience Center. The motion carried unanimously.

c. Social Services:

1. Bobby Boyd, Social Services Director presented the status of the County seeking Work First Electing County Status.

Work First began in North Carolina in 1995 by Executive Order of the Governor. In 1996, Congress ended the national welfare program known as AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and crafted legislation to allow states to implement their own welfare programs. This federal devolution of authority enabled the North Carolina General Assembly to go even further with welfare reform. The legislature took the next step by allowing counties to compete for Electing County status – in essence offering a limited number of counties the opportunity to have greater control over local welfare policies, as well as greater control over available funding.

In prior years, there were numerous advantages to being an Electing County. Electing Counties are given greater flexibility in establishing eligibility policies (who is eligible to receive assistance and under what conditions); however, through the years, the state has gradually adapted the state plan to mirror the policies recommended by counties vying for Electing status. At this time, the primary advantage for Catawba County in pursuing Electing County status is financial.

The state pays 100% of cash assistance benefits for Work First eligible families in Standard Counties; however, as an Electing County, Catawba will receive an allocation to utilize for cash assistance. If the caseload and payments to families increases dramatically – above the allocation – the County is required to cover 100% of the excess costs. If caseloads decrease or remain stable, an electing county may use the unexpended cash allocation balance to offset other eligible program and/or administrative expenses.

Catawba County staff has analyzed the spending patterns for the past three years. Staff project that it is possible to cover all assistance payments to families as well as some additional program costs associated with the program administration that are currently being paid from county funds with the fixed allocation that will be given to the Catawba County Work First Program. Catawba County chose to vie for Electing County status as a result of this potential for saving county dollars.

On November 1, 2004, Catawba County's Electing County plan for Fiscal Years 2005-2007 was submitted to state officials. The General Assembly grants Electing County status with budget approval that as yet has not been decided; however, all indications suggest Catawba County will be an Electing County. The approval is given to counties as long as the total assistance cases in those counties do not exceed 15% of the total Work First families statewide. The total for all counties requesting Electing Status is less than 15%.

County Manager Lundy stated he had some questions. He asked how many NC counties are currently electing and Mr. Boyd said he thought it was about 11 and then Mr. Lundy asked that if this was such a good deal, why weren't more counties electing. Mr. Boyd said they have looked at it for several years and the risks were not appropriate at that time but now it appears to be a different situation and the county now has a longer track record to analyze and see how caseload will affect the electing status. Mr. Boyd believes the quality staff and the quality of the work ethic in the community are contributing factors in determining if the status will be beneficial to a county. He said it is more work and that may be why some counties do not seek the status. Mr. Lundy asked if the other 11 counties were urban or rural and the reply was that they were mainly small counties. Chair Barnes asked what happened to their funding if they were electing – did that freeze the funds at this level with the State and Mr. Boyd said that was the case for two years only unless Congress did something to change the program.

Mr. Boyd suggested even though this had been presented as an informational item only, that the Board may go ahead and take action to approve this effort and County Manager Lundy agreed the Board should take action and approve Social Services seeking electing status. Commissioner Barger made a motion to move forward with an application to become an electing status county. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Bobby Boyd, Director of Social Services, presented an informational presentation on the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003.

The Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 created the most seismic federal shift from Medicaid to Medicare since the inception of both programs. Phase 1 created two pathways for Medicare recipients to use in the interim prior to the beginning of the prescription drug benefit:

- Medicare approved drug discount cards promised up to 25% savings on an array of prescription drugs; and
- A transitional assistance program offered beneficiaries with low incomes up to a \$1200 credit on the card over two years toward the cost of their drugs.

Although final data on the use of the discount card program is not available, it is known that of the 35 million persons eligible for the card, six million, fewer than 20% enrolled. Of the six million who enrolled, more than half were automatic enrollments by Medicare HMOs or state drug assistance programs like North Carolina's Senior Care. The transitional assistance program was even less successful with only 1.5 million of the estimated seven million eligible persons enrolled. HMOs and state drug assistance programs also automatically enrolled the majority of those receiving benefits from this program. Fully 75% of eligible recipients are not receiving benefits.

Phase 2 of the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 becomes effective January 1, 2006. It will authorize the largest expansion of the Medicare program since its creation in 1965, offering recipients the option of prescription drug coverage for the first time. Medicaid will no longer cover prescription drugs as of December 31, 2005. This change will affect all current Medicaid recipients including Medicare/Medicaid (dual eligibles). Medicare Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs) will provide insurance coverage for prescription drugs and, like other insurance, if a beneficiary joins, will require a monthly premium (approximately \$35 in 2006) and payment of a share of the cost of the prescriptions. Costs will vary depending on the drug plan selected. PDPs are expected to vary in the prescriptions covered and the amount a beneficiary must pay as well as the pharmacies that may be used. All plans must provide at least a standard level of coverage and additional drugs for a higher monthly premium. It will be critical for beneficiaries to compare plans and select the one that best meets their needs. PDP enrollment begins November 1, 2005 and ends May 15, 2006. Coverage will begin the first day of the month following the month the beneficiary enrolls, so it will be important to enroll by December 31, 2005. Information on approved PDPs will not be available nationwide until October 15th. It will be included in the October *Medicare and You 2006* handbook published by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that will list all the approved Medicare prescription drug plans in North Carolina. Recipients with limited incomes and resources will be eligible for additional help from the Low Income Subsidy (LIS) that is projected to cover between 85% and 100% of expenses associated with the drug coverage for many limited income beneficiaries. CMS will automatically enroll this group of persons in a PDP; however, all others qualifying for assistance (those currently enrolled in a Medicare Savings Program) will be required to select a drug plan. North Carolina is one of eight states in the nation with the highest number of eligible persons for the LIS – 517,000 with only 245,000 currently receiving benefits. It is estimated Catawba County has approximately 3,000 persons in this category. CMS has designated the Social Security Administration lead responsibility for this program along with the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP), Social Services, Area Agencies on Aging and other local agencies such as the Council on Aging, Senior Centers, etc.

Catawba County has over 18,000 seniors who are Medicare recipients as well as eligible disabled citizens who are not currently receiving benefits. The medical community, health care professionals, provider agencies and pharmacies all have key roles in a successful transition to this program. A community response is vital to assure that information, education and assistance are provided to all eligible persons. Social Services has invited an initial group of potential community partners to meet to develop a collaborative plan to address these needs within the constrained time frames required for action.

Since Medicare is providing a prescription drug program and Medicaid will no longer provide such a benefit to Medicare eligible citizens, one would think there would be a financial savings for the state and county. It is not the case! Federal law requires states to continue paying about the same amount as previously paid for Medicaid drug benefit. North Carolina is passing the same share (15% of non-federal cost) to counties. Chair Barnes equated this to an unfounded mandate. Commissioner Barger said that the immediate challenge will be not necessarily those who are clearly eligible for full coverage but those people above that poverty level trying to make some decision about plans and what they sign up for and this will be taxing on Social Services and the County as a public body to try and get these people the information they need to make these decisions. Mr. Boyd said meetings are currently scheduled with approximately 20 groups to plan for this assistance in public information. Chair Barnes asked Mr. Boyd how well Catawba County did in getting information to its citizens regarding the various ways to get prescription drugs. Mr. Boyd said he was unsure but he noted that nationwide only 20% of those eligible for the national drug program applied.

11. Attorneys' Report. None.
12. Manager's Report. None.
13. Other items of business. None.
14. Adjournment. Commissioner Barger made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Beatty noted that Senator Dole would be in the County at 3:00 to present a check from USDA for the Oxford Base. Commissioner Beatty also noted that the Balls Creeks Camp Meeting starts the 14th through the 28th. The motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Katherine W. Barnes, Chair
Board of Commissioners

Barbara E. Morris, County Clerk